

Judit Juhász

THE CHANCE TO HAVE A WORTHY HUMAN LIFE

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**PROVIDING UNIVERSAL AND INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO
ERADICATE POVERTY**

Doctoral Thesis

Szeged, 2020

University of Szeged
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Doctoral School of Economics

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Supervisors:

Dr. habil György Málovics, Associate Professor

Dr. habil Zoltán Bajmócy, Associate Professor

University of Szeged
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Research Centre

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1. Introduction and Research Questions

This doctoral dissertation examines the possibilities and ways to provide poverty alleviation. Over the past decades, – in particular after the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals – significant progress has been made on a global scale in many aspects of human development, including extreme poverty or malnutrition. Official statistics may allow us to be optimistic, but it is also important to point out that in recent decades Hungary has seen a constitutional narrowing of the right to social security and the strengthening of anti-poor discourses (Darvas 2015, Váradi 2015, Ferge 2008). We have witnessed progress globally and locally as well, on the basis of official poverty data, but the processes are complex, inequalities are tremendous (UNDP 2019a), and the presence of poverty is obvious and still considered one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century.

The Human Development Report highlights the importance of the principle of universalism which requires that freedom and human development should be accessible to all people without exception. This means freedom to realize the full potential of one's life – both now and in the future (UNDP 2017). Today, global poverty-related efforts are determinedly committed to completely eradicate it. The Human Development Reports, first published in 1990, are based on Amartya Sen's economic theory, i.e. the capability approach (UNDP2019a, UNDP 2017, UNDP 2010, Robeyns 2006). In it, Sen defines poverty as a lack of available capabilities/opportunities and development in the face of an enlargement in capabilities/opportunities, so that individuals can live life such that they have reasons to value it (Sen 2003/1999). One of the most important – and mostly unanswered – questions recurring in capability literature reflects how capabilities/opportunities should be selected as relevant and who should decide on this (Crocker 2008) - and more specifically, who decides and how in terms of which opportunities of the individual could be expanded and in what way; also: what a good life is for an individual to live and value (Sen 2003/1999, Alkire 2002, Nussbaum 1993). Martha Nussbaum's contribution is also crucial to the development of the capability approach. Sen leaves the choice of capabilities/opportunities to the people themselves, while Nussbaum defines a generally valid list as a reference for expanding the availability of capabilities/opportunities (Nussbaum 2011).

The capability approach focuses on the theoretical question of how it would be worthwhile to improve the situation of the poor, but there is less emphasis on how theoretical insights come together with practical experience and how field experience

enriches the theoretical concepts of poverty. In order to enable each person to realize the full potential of their life, following the principle of universalism, the Human Development Report (UNDP 2019a, UNDP 2017) recommends micro-level application and review of theoretical arrangements. In practice, during the processes of poverty-alleviation programs, it is very common that an assisting party (an individual or a group) appears in the lives of the poor. These actors may influence the process and direction through which the lives of these people are formed, and how their opportunities are developed and expanded. In connection with this issue, the second research sub-question of my doctoral research is:

- (1) In a modern Hungarian city, what practices and attitudes do helpers follow when interacting with poor people? In the course of their practical poverty-alleviation activities, who decides and how in terms of which opportunities of the individual living in poverty can be expanded, and how; what is a good life for an individual that she/he can live and value?

Another aim of my doctoral research is to harmonize poverty assistance-related theory and practice, and to reflect on the initial theory. The third research sub-question supports that:

- (2) Who decides, and how in terms of which opportunities of the individual living in poverty can be expanded; what is a good life for the individual that she/he can live and value it, based on a comparison of the theoretical basis of the capability approach and human development theory, the literature of poverty, and the experience of those carrying out practical activities?

2. Structure of the Dissertation

This inquiry aims to contribute to research work on poverty eradication with a global perspective, but via a local investigation. I applied a qualitative, exploratory research method to learn about actions and efforts at local level. Qualitative research is characterized by circularity, the alternation of theory and empirical investigation (Sántha 2011). Theoretical research creates a framework for empirical research. Then empirical data collection and evaluation allow clarification and enrichment of the initial theory (*Table 1*).

Table 1. The chapters of the thesis related to the qualitative circle

Qualitative research phases based on Sántha (2011)	Related chapters of the thesis
Weak theory	1. Introduction
Formulation of questions	2. Poverty today
Deduction	3. Poverty in human development theory
Planning data collection	4. Qualitative research on poverty alleviation activities in a Hungarian city 5. Analysis of empirical results and new theoretical aspects
Empirical research	
Creative data evaluation, analysis	
Induction	
Clarification of the theory	6. Analysis of empirical results and new theoretical aspects
The theory	Conclusions: The chance of a worthy human life

Source: own construction

I begin my dissertation with a chapter entitled "*Poverty today*". In it, I present how we interpret poverty in global, European and Hungarian contexts today. I take into account the most relevant definitions and measures that are currently in use and which shape our understanding of poverty. Relying on these, I go on to present current poverty data and context in Hungary, Europe, and the world, as well as detailing the main efforts to eradicate poverty. The function of this chapter is to show the context of my research and to see where we are now on the path towards ending poverty. The chapter also provides a summary of official Hungarian measures and data and suggests that readers investigate further. The general goals and efforts to eradicate poverty are also outlined, and these will form the foundation of the following chapters.

In the chapter "*Poverty in human development theory*", I clarify the relationship between the capability approach and human development theory, then I describe how development is seen in these approaches and in mainstream economics. I present the basic concepts of the capability approach, and the position of the two most important contributors to the theory, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The aims of this chapter

are to enable a full understanding of the dissertation's research questions and to answer my first research sub-question.

In the chapter "*Qualitative research on poverty alleviation activities in a Hungarian city.*" I describe the methodology of my qualitative research, which focuses on the experience of the assisting participants in poverty-alleviation activities. To support this I conducted 40 in-depth interviews. In this chapter, I present the participants of the research, the interview process, the structure of the interviews, the recording and analysis process, and the descriptive analysis of the results. I maintained a focus on: The types of poverty-alleviation activities, the processes of contacting the poor, and the general views of assisting actors. One of the functions of this chapter – and the whole qualitative research – is to contribute to the direction of international endeavors, to make poverty eradication and related theories tangible at a practical, local level. Another important function is that it presents a qualitative in-depth interviewing process in detail, which may be of interest to other qualitative researchers. In addition, this chapter answers the second research sub-question.

In the chapter "*Analysis of empirical results and new theoretical aspects*", I present such empirical results that could not have been developed without more theoretical investigation. In the analysis, I emphasize the objective of empowerment through the psychological perspectives of poverty and the role of education, the processes in interactions through the importance of autonomy and power, and the possibility and limitations of free choice through the issue of paternalism, nudge and boost. One of the functions of this chapter is to deepen and refine knowledge about local helping processes by setting up and revealing new layers of the interviews. Another function is to reflect on the capability approach and human development theory by explaining the content of the interviews and analysing and commenting on new poverty-related theoretical approaches and to answer the third research sub-question.

In the chapter "*Conclusions: The chance to have a worthy human life*", I answer the third sub-question of my dissertation, and I summarize the conclusions of my research. The "*Introduction*" and the "*Final Thoughts*" sections frame the dissertation.

3. Theoretical background

The dissertation relies greatly on and relates strongly to the capability approach and the human development theory. In recent decades, a gradual shift has taken place in the

discourse on development, which is about making progress, not in material abundance and economic growth, but in promoting human well-being, freedom, and quality of life (UNDP 2019a, UNDP 2017). On this basis, economic growth and income growth are no longer objectives, but can be important means for development. The growth-centered approaches may be considered too narrow and incomplete (UNDP 2017, Bajmócy–Gébert 2014, Anand–Sen 2000). There are numerous processes behind this shift. I underline two thoughts on the subject of poverty below.

On the one hand, it is noticeable that the measures and definitions that recognize poverty as a multidimensional, complex phenomenon are increasingly being prioritized and beyond the material aspects of poverty, they also include other important aspects, such as access to education and healthcare. On the other hand, the perception of the relationship between poverty alleviation and economic growth has greatly changed in recent decades. Various research has shown that growth does not ensure an automatic reduction in poverty and inequality, and that the poor can be left out of the benefits of growth (Todaro–Smith 2015, Khumalo 2013, Unwin 2004, Szelényi 2001). The growing divide between the middle class and those living in extreme poverty is seen as one of the biggest failures of global development efforts (Roser–Ortiz-Ospina 2019, UN 2019a).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the capability approach was only one of the competitive approaches covered in international discourse on development and inequalities. In recent decades, however, it has gained particular attention among thinkers in the area of human well-being and development and has now become a leading alternative to mainstream economic frameworks (Clark 2012b, Crocker 2008, Robeyns 2006). In 1998, Sen was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics. The capability approach is now arguably the inspiration and foundation for the human development theory and the UN Human Development Report (UNDP2019a, UNDP 2017), which regularly demonstrate the global situation on development.

In the following sections, and in terms of the capability approach, I consider the economic approach that was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. I use the term *human development theory* when I refer to the theory that – based on the capability approach – seeks to expand the understanding and the facilitation of the process of human development, and which helps the development of theoretical and practical endeavors, and the global and local expansion of people's freedom. I use the term *human development* in itself when I refer to the process of development. In accordance with these, I see the human development theory as a broader concept than the capability approach, though

they cannot be separated, since they have the same theoretical and paradigmatic foundations.

In human development theory “human development is about enlarging freedoms so that all human beings can pursue choices that they value” (UNDP 2017, p. 1.). In this way, the goal is human development in itself. There is an immediate, substantial gain in expanding people's opportunities and living a worthy life (Anand–Sen 2000). Thus, with this approach, we are reducing poverty not to promote growth, but to promote a better life for people.

In this dissertation, I relied on the capability approach because it fits into the international endeavor to eradicate global poverty. It does not see financial expansion as an objective in itself but also does not exclude its potential importance in eliminating poverty. It provides a systematic theoretical framework for the issue of poverty and development, while at the same time it is open and flexible, making it possible to address poverty as a complex phenomenon, to involve other related topics and theories. Within my examination of it, I reflect back to the initial theory itself.

4. Research methods

In my empirical examination, I carried out qualitative, explorative research with an interpretive, constructivist approach. According to this, the focus was on participants’ interpretations, which evolved during the research as well. The knowledge built up during the interviews was the result of construction, in which the influence of the researcher is recognized as well.

Between 2017 January 22 and June 30, I conducted 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives of local poverty-mitigation groups, including NGOs (foundations, associations), informal civil organizations, municipal-public bodies and social enterprises (or organizations that also carry out economic activities). During the interviews, I chose the active interview method in accordance with the constructivist approach (Holstein–Gubrium 1995). According to this, the interpretation of the participants is also developed through the practice of interviewing. The respondent and the interviewer construct a meaning together as partners and participate in the creation of knowledge in a so-called traveler interview (Brinkmann–Kvale 2015). The interview embraced five topics. In the **first** topic, I asked about the evolution of the group/organization, the connection between the individual (respondent) and the group. In the **second** topic, we discussed the organization's activities, focusing on the organization's

purpose, mission, and applied methods. In the **third** section, my aim was to identify the factors behind the operation of the organization, focusing on the values they represent, the methodology they use and the factors that they are influenced by. In the **fourth** topic, I asked about the relationship between the values of the organization and the interviewee, then generally about value community or differences within the organization. In the **fifth** topic, the relationship between the organization/facilitators and the poor people in question was taken as a focus point, including the similarity and differences in the values of facilitators and poor people, the ways of reaching out and channeling the views of the people they work with and addressing the differences in values between the parties (facilitator and people in need).

All interviewees allowed me to record the interviews, so I could make literal transcripts. In my analysis, I used the "ad hoc" analysis method by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015). Considering my final method, it is similar to discourse analysis (Potter 1997) and Charmaz's grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). The ad-hoc analysis used means that instead of a specific procedure, I have developed my own method of analysis that fits the research topic. I used intra-coding, – I followed a variety of analytical directions – primarily to verify my analysis.

In my dissertation I present the results in three descriptive subsections, then three analytical subsections (*Table 2*). This table shows the structure I used when presenting the results. In the descriptive subsections, I describe the content of the interviews without using any theoretical concepts or explanations. The issues raised in the theory of human development and the capability approach are reflected in the interview design of my empirical research, but at this point, I do not link the interviews' content with theory.

The interviews provided complex additional content. In order to present them and to further understand the information we learned in the previous chapter, I needed further reading and theoretical research. In my dissertation, I analyze the topics that required further research in three main subsections. The theoretical expansion makes it possible to interpret the content of the interviews, and the joint examination of empirical experiences with theoretical insights helps reflect on the initial theory and articulate the conclusions.

Table 2 Description of the results

Descriptive chapters	Related analytical chapters
Types of poverty-alleviation activities	Analysis of empowerment - Psychological perspectives of poverty - Education for poverty reduction
Processes of contacting the poor, and the general views of assisting actors and activities.	Interaction between stakeholders - The importance of autonomy - Power relations between stakeholders
The general views of assisting actors	Analysis of the possibility of free choice - Analysis on paternalism - Alternative ways of expanding opportunities

Source: own construction

5. Main findings

- thesis: The principles of practical poverty-alleviation groups are often transformed when they meet the deepest poverty and need.* (Related to the first research sub-question)

There are many social service actors in the city, who seek to alleviate poverty and help poor people with significant energy investments. The initiatives are very diverse, but most of the activities are grouped around donation schemes and stable networks have also developed primarily with regard to donation activities. Some kind of donation form often appears even in programs where the emphasis is on a different method. Among the helping programs, educational activities are also considerable (in the form of individual tutoring or afternoon school services). To a lesser extent, there are programs that apply helping conversations and consultative methods (some kind of a coaching methods). With a few active representatives, there are initiatives that work with community-based, creative art-based methods, community development processes or participatory action research. These activities – in a few cases – are combined with political advocacy, social awareness-raising programs, and scientific research.

On the basis of human development, there are some important aspects of poverty alleviation that should be followed during practical interventions, including the principle of empowerment, participation and the free choice of the people. Some local assistant interviewees are familiar with these principles from literature, while others think about poverty alleviation based on their own experiences. Either way, most of the interviewees represent all of these aspects and principles. In practice, however, following these principles is challenging. Principles and approaches are often transformed in practical activities when the helpers encounter the deepest poverty and need. Based on the interviews, this is strengthened by two aspects. If all the activities examined are taken into account, in practice, only a few initiatives can actually follow the principle of empowerment and the active pursuit of the long-term well-being of people. The fact that poor people often need acute help to meet their most basic needs (food, firewood, etc.) makes it difficult to prioritize helping actions that focus on empowerment. Therefore, long-term vision and empowerment goals can be overshadowed, and the practical helping activities may manifest in donations (rather than more valuable advisory activities) to alleviate the urgent need.

The importance of poor people's participation and the consideration of their aims and values – to varying degrees, but still considerably – are natural for the local helping society. It is important even in cases of donation processes to assess the nature and extent of the need. In general, helping facilitators either fully accept the values and objectives of the people they work with or believe that the norms and values of both parties have an important role in cooperation. Necessarily, interaction is becoming more frequent when changes in the values of poor people are also among the goals of the helping participants. But even in the case of the most personal and friendly cooperation, it happens that the main tool for helping is listening. The goal and desire of change in the values of the poor appear as a long-term goal, in the general attitude and values of the helpers. However, arising from the interviews, there are situations where generally represented principles cannot be followed and are often overridden. The interviewees expressed that there are habits and norms among the poor that are difficult or cannot be accepted (e.g. domestic violence, crimes, drug use, etc.). These may contribute to the emergence of a paternalistic approach. Overall, following the principles considered important in theory can be transformed and overridden in practice, during real-life actions.

2. *thesis: Many poor people are excluded from poverty alleviation activities. In the local helping community, there are not enough resources to allow social services*

to cooperate with all people in need or to provide complex treatment in the most needy situations. (Related to the first research sub-question)

In the city and neighborhoods, helpers and poor people can find each other in several ways. Although helping participants cooperate with many people, they are not able to meet or cooperate with all the people in need. Many poor people are not getting help or sufficient help. There are various reasons for this. It is easier to follow one's own principles or the generally accepted poverty alleviation principles and to develop cooperation with those who are not living in the deepest poverty. There is sometimes no intention to cooperate with everyone on the part of the helping participants, because the distance between the values, norms, and behaviors of the helpers and the poor is so wide in some cases that it is unlikely to be bridged, or it would be very difficult. In some cases, it is the poor people who are not willing to cooperate. They are living in an isolated environment, they distrust others, and hardly accept help or do not require it at all. Thus, many problems remain hidden, and visiting the most isolated people is hard and contradictory. People in the most difficult situation have limited or no access at all to official information or announcements; they are not confident in public institutions, in new environments, and often their mobility is not sufficient. Sometimes the necessary assistance tools (e.g. housing solutions) are completely absent or not accessible for everyone due to the limiting capacity of the helping participants. Sometimes, this cooperation does not work well between the helping and poor participants despite good mutual intentions. When dealing with extreme poverty, helpers may face many problems that they are not able to solve due to the lack of resources or competence. For example, if there is a need for psychotherapy, adequate housing or personalized education.

3. *thesis: Practical experiences of poverty alleviation groups and insights from other theoretical concepts related to poverty, enrich our knowledge about the capability approach, the human development theory and poverty alleviation. (Related to the second research sub-question.)*

The capability approach is a broad concept that synthesizes the topic of poverty coherently.

Yet it is often criticized for being too general, uncertain, and elusive. Related research showed that other theoretical concepts covering the topic of poverty and the practical experiences of local poverty alleviation groups enrich our knowledge about the capability approach, the human development theory and poverty alleviation in general.

For example, relevant literature agrees that one of the foundations of poverty alleviation is focusing on empowerment, but based solely on the capability approach, we don't know how to put it into practice, what conditions should be realized and what obstacles we may face during the process. The interviewees' practical experience and other important theoretical insights on poverty alleviation can contribute to a deeper understanding of the process of empowerment. In practice, the presence of deep poverty may diminish the goal of empowerment among helpers, since resources must be devoted to providing the most urgent needs. For example, if food and firewood are primarily needed, the helping participant will try to provide these, rather than funding parents' education or participation in useful courses, which might be more helpful regarding their long-term prosperity.

Practical empowerment processes are also very much influenced by psychological aspects. Based on recent scientific research, the emotional and cognitive state of those living in poverty is in many ways a determining factor in their survival in the face of serious difficulties: Worrying about financial problems limits free cognitive resources. The presence of depression, sadness, different survival strategies, the effect of child poverty, etc. makes their chances to escape poverty difficult. In practical initiatives, the consideration of psychological aspects is very rare. On the one hand, the weight of the problem is not realized sufficiently among the helping society, on the other hand, handling psychological problems requires special expertise.

Education is also an essential aspect when following the principles of empowerment and the expansion of opportunities in practice. Ensuring access to education is one of the most important factors in eradicating poverty and empowerment. However, poverty itself makes access to decent education difficult. Local helpers build on the importance of education, but they cannot make up for the socio-economic disadvantages or stigmatization.

The concept of autonomy also deepens the understanding of empowerment. If the individual's autonomy is impaired during social-worker/assistant collaboration, it won't be empowering for her/him. During the interviews, the preservation and respect for individual autonomy were expressed by very few. Because of its elusiveness, it also shows up less frequently in literature. Greater use of the concept of autonomy and emphasis of the phenomenon would be necessary for practical poverty-alleviation processes as well.

Acknowledging the concept of power also helps to develop poverty alleviation solutions. People should realize that they have the power to create value, to cooperate with others, and should have faith in their self-worth. Beyond the positive power categories, however, considering destructive, controlling types of power is also essential when trying to understand poverty. Sometimes destructive, controlling power dynamics (that occur frequently in practical interactions and are common in social dynamics as well) make it difficult for poor people to prosper and to expand their opportunities. This also reinforces the vulnerability of helping participants. Based on both theory and practice, there are cases where it is not possible for poor people to make a free choice, – or at least this path does not seem correct to them. In this situation, the thought of paternalism may arise, which is problematic in several respects. Paternalism violates autonomy, authentic decision making, partnerships, and equality, all of which are the cornerstones of poverty alleviation.

The dichotomy, which lies between following the basic principles of poverty alleviation and the emergence of paternalism is reflected in interviews and in literature as well. How is it possible to help people to avoid harming themselves (for example by using synthetic drugs) and at the same time maintain their free choice? The ideas of *nudge* and *boost* offer options to enhance better decision making in the short or long term, without limiting freedom.

The idea of *boost* seeks to influence the actors and improve their life and cognitive processes by targeting their conscious, cognitive state and maintaining their autonomy. This may provide a lesson on poverty alleviation processes, as it respects the basic principles of it. To sum up, based on my research, it is worth thinking within the framework of the capability approach, but at the same time, the knowledge gathered in practical experience and the insights of other theoretical concepts greatly enrich the knowledge of the capability approach and poverty alleviation processes.

4. *thesis: The combination of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's views is reasonable, based on practical experiences and theoretical concepts as well. In practice, the implementation of Sen's approach needs to be supported, and this can be provided by Nussbaum's approach.* (Related to the second research sub-question.)

In my doctoral research, I found that there is a huge opportunity in combining Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's approach. They may function as complementary theories

rather than as competing theories and applicable practices. In the capability approach and the human development theory, the views of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum are often interpreted as two endpoints in terms of the question of expanding capabilities/opportunities. This dichotomy can distract us from understanding the main intention and motivation behind them. Theoretical review shows that although the two representatives of the capability approach often express similar phenomena differently, Sen and Nussbaum's positions indicate similar directions, and can theoretically be aligned in many theoretical terms. Instead of functionings/doings and beings, they both focus on the importance of capabilities/opportunities that are available for the individual or the community. Hence, no one is forced to choose a specific functioning. They stress that individuals should be able to create the components of a good life for themselves (to plan and control their lives) and to learn how to do so. Both highlight the importance of poor people's participation during their empowerment processes, though they put the emphasis in differing places. Sen leaves the questions of selecting capabilities/opportunities to the people themselves, while Nussbaum argues for a well-defined list of capabilities/opportunities. However, Sen acknowledges that particular capabilities/opportunities can be especially important and that we can find grounded reasons to provide these capabilities/opportunities (such as being well-nourished, healthy or acting as an agent). Nussbaum provides a universal list of fixed capabilities/opportunities but still considers them optional. The elements of her list are the result of deliberation with stakeholders, poor communities and other thinkers, and she has revised it several times over the years. In addition, the items are very generally defined, so they definitely require local specification when it comes to ensuring their success on a local level (whoever is trying to do so). Overall, the two approaches seem to deliver a fundamentally different message in their related literature, but after a deeper examination, on the basis of the theoretical review, they do not exclude each other. The two views can be theoretically aligned within the capability approach.

Empowerment is very difficult in practice, as often there is a lack of basic material and of non-material needs and opportunities among poor people. Handling this acute shortage becomes a priority in many initiatives. Free choice between capabilities/opportunities and purposeful consideration of poor people's goals and values cannot be guaranteed to happen particularly in the most difficult situations. The set of capabilities/opportunities available in deep poverty contains very few elements, often the same as the set of functionings, which requires urgent expansion. However, it may be

only about relieving symptoms (i.e. when the help on offer is terminated, the original condition returns). Not only can the number of capabilities in the set available to poor people, but also its content be a problem for helpers. Mental and cognitive difficulties or generally unaccepted behavior may lead to the emergence of paternalism, but this again violates the principles of poverty alleviation. It cannot be a long-term, empowering solution as paternalism limits freedom and the possibility of autonomous decision making. On the other hand, in the long term, helpers cannot – or only very, very slowly can – change these situations as a result of the shortage of resources and competences. However, the need for change and relief is crucial in these cases. There are many situations that we cannot handle in the present, so many people may be left alone in bad, deep circumstances. The pursuit of empowerment principles is easier when people are already in a relatively more favorable position and when they are not isolated. In many cases, there is no cooperation at all due to the seriousness of the deep situation or isolation. According to these insights, we cannot rely simply on Sen's approach.

I do not want to suggest that help is acceptable and understandable in almost any form and that the goal of empowerment can be overshadowed simply because it is difficult to follow. However, I would like to stress that poverty in itself is a situation based in deprivation in which an important part of a worthy human existence is violated. This part can be autonomy, internal self-esteem, the ability to cooperate, productive power, or the combination of these, etc. This varies from person to person, from community to community. According to Sen, the empowerment process can be enhanced if a person decides on the capabilities that are valuable for her/him for a reason. However, this is not possible in poor environments, and in extreme poverty in particular, for a number of reasons, and the problem is not only the paternalistic view of helpers. For example, a lack of decision making position in the family; a lack of feeling of self-worth; a lack of access to information; a lack of mobility, a lack of means as well: money, food, housing, home-heating fire, clothing. Even if the helping participant seeks (and should seek in all cases) to strengthen and maintain their autonomy, free choice and interpersonal power, a number of factors work against this. Even if the helper ensures free decisions, she/he should be aware that in the deep situation there is no such thing as a free decision. It is influenced and suppressed by a number of structural factors and their local manifestations.

Theoretical examination and the empirical results suggest that instead of choosing between the Nussbaumian and Sen approaches, their combination and co-adaptation may bring us closer to sufficiently shaping extreme situations. This would mean that the state

and society as a whole would ensure that each of its citizens, even those in the most difficult situations, have access to universal capabilities/opportunities. The two approaches would relate to different levels of society and would be partly connected to each other. On the basis of Nussbaum's view (or a similar approach), it would be necessary to formulate a universal list (at macro-level) of capabilities/opportunities. Of course, it would be essential to put these into practice at local level as is required by both approaches (at the micro-level). The local interpretation and specification of capabilities/opportunities and free choice can be made by people themselves.

Nussbaum's view is not only about providing the necessary means, since the list includes items such as life, physical health, physical integrity, imagination and thoughts, emotions, etc. Rather, it means the provision of an atmosphere in which it is easier to make free and autonomous choices that contribute to our well-being and that of others, and to live a life that we have a reason to value. If there was a real intention to provide the universal capabilities/opportunities necessary for human existence, the practical initiatives of local helpers would have greater space and capacity to follow the principles of empowerment, participation and free choice. The weight of providing basic conditions would not be concentrated primarily on local helping participants – and this should cover basic mental health care, access to education or equality between partners within the family. In such cases, poor people would be less dependent on their helping assistants, the vulnerability of the helpers would diminish as well, and the parties would have more freedom to shape the cooperation, which would take place in a more equal, more horizontal relationship, and only where there is a real demand for cooperation.

How can we provide this atmosphere? From this question new research goals and questions arise. For example, how can the idea of nudge and boost help the two views of the capability approach unite? How do we develop the list on which we strive to follow the Nussbaumian approach? We have a number of options for choosing between guidelines, capability/opportunity lists – even temporarily. However, the number one step would be to assume the intention to provide every single person in our society with the necessary conditions for a worthy human life. This can serve as a basis for a legitimate social debate about the set of capabilities/opportunities and the ways in which they are shaped and implemented. A lack of universal intention complicates the circumstances, which certainly affects the behavior of each participant, the nature of helping actions and how people accept them as well. Denying and criminalizing poverty can lead to the isolation of people living in poverty and an increase in general prejudice in society. Poor

people may become more vulnerable, so helpers can only focus on easing the urgent need and not on fostering the process of empowerment.

The local helping society invests considerable resources and energies to alleviate poverty in a rather empathetic, tolerant and accepting environment. However, it is also essential to create a socio-structural environment in which there is a determination to eradicate extreme poverty, to recognize and support social activities, and to create a medium for education, a balanced flow of information, and open public discussion on poverty-related issues. With my research I have also tried to contribute to this broad issue.

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